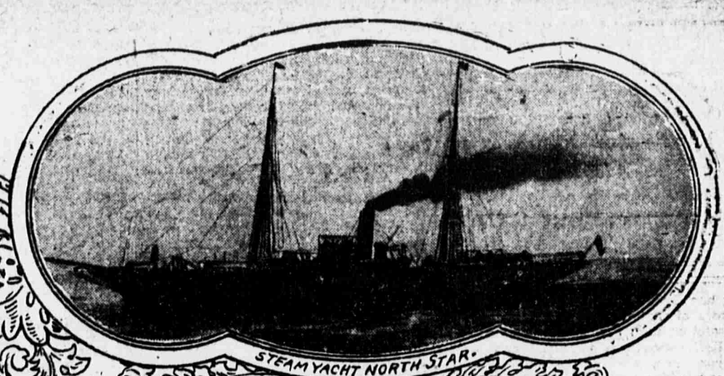
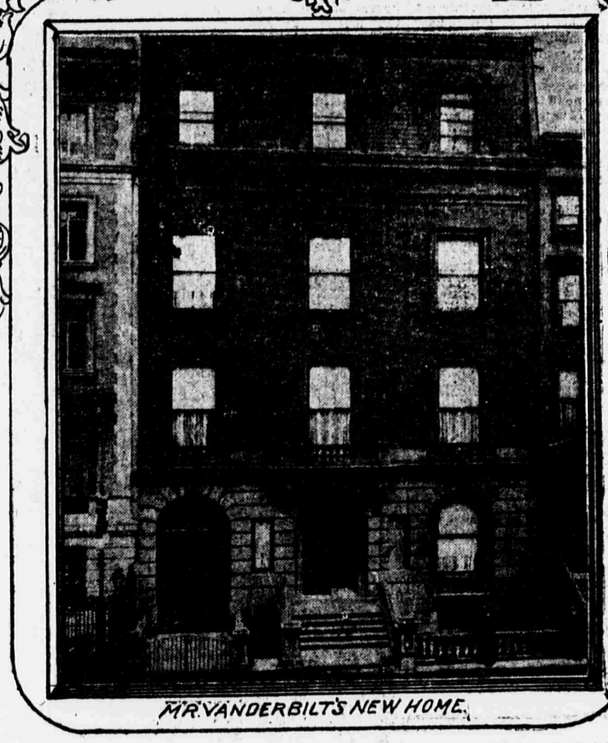
Cornelius Vanderbilt the Third

Though a Rich Man's Son, He Made His Own Way in the World—A Successful Inventor and a Director in Many Corporations—Now He May Become a Diplomatist.




MR. VANDERBILT'S NEW HOME.

The report is that Cornelius Vanderbilt not long after March 4 will become, instead of a busy young inventor, a busy young diplomatist, accredited to the court of his great and good friend, Emperor William II. of Germany, as First Secretary of the United States Embassy at Berlin. If the report is true it may be taken for granted that Mr. Vanderbilt will be as busy as a diplomatist as he has been as an inventor.

That's the way he's built—just as his father was before him. The second Cornelius Vanderbilt was during his life about as hardworking a man, rich or poor, as there was in New York. He was a director in something like fifty corporations and he gave his attention to the details of the business of each.

It was well known to his friends that the second Cornelius Vanderbilt would not accept an office in any organization simply for the purpose of lending to it his name. If he could not take, for want of time, a personal interest in its affairs, he declined to become an officer of it.

At 31 the third Cornelius Vanderbilt is very much a chip from the old block. He is a director in just twenty corporations, among which are the Allis-Chalmers Company, American-Asiatic Steamship Company, Audit Company of New York, Illinois Central Railroad, Interborough Rapid Transit Company, Lackawanna Steel Company, Marine National Bank of Buffalo, Mexican Telegraph Company, Mutual Bank, Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, New York Life Insurance and Trust Company, National Park Bank, Provident Loan Society of New York, Rapid Transit Subway Construction Company, Subway Realty Company, United States Mortgage and Trust Company, Windsor Trust Company and Yorkville Bank.

This young man, who is not overwealthy as great wealth is counted in these days, is said to hold offices of trust in more of the country's great corporations, financial and industrial, than any other man of his age in the United States. Harry Payne Whitney, who married Mr. Vanderbilt's elder sister, Gertrude, is said to come next as a director in nineteen corporations. Alfred Gwynne, Cornelius Vanderbilt's younger brother and the inheritor of the bulk of his father's estate, holds a directorship in nine corporations, most of them in the Adirondacks, while William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., a cousin of Cornelius, is a director in just two.

But the difference between Cornelius Vanderbilt and his brothers, brother-in-law and cousin is that he had no rich father to stand sponsor for him to graybeards in the directorates of the corporations. He was accepted as a fellow director, by men old enough to be his father, at his face value and through no influence other than that of his personal qualifications.

His father was dead long before the young man was invited by a single corporation to give to it his advice in the management of millions. But had the father been alive the son could have got no recommendation from him. The two were not even on speaking terms when the father died half a dozen years ago. And the whole country knows why.

It knows how the young man, who would naturally have succeeded to the headship of the great house of Vanderbilt, fell in love with a girl of his own station and made her his wife in spite of all the father's stubborn opposition and in spite of the threat of disinheritance, a threat made good in the father's will, under which the second son got nearly $50,000,000 and the eldest son got a half million outright and a full million in trust, the principal to go to his children at his death.

That was the fortune with which young Cornelius Vanderbilt started to make his way in the world. To be sure, his brother Alfred gave him about six of the $50,000,000 he received under the will, in order that Cornelius's share should be equal to that of the other brothers and sisters. That gift included, the fortune of the practically disinherited son is estimated now to be about $5,000,000; but that gift came as a compromise, some time after the father's death.

When the young man first attracted the attention of some of the world's greatest financiers, his interests were not such as of themselves to bring about his election to the directorate of a single corporation. Some of the father's best friends, who believed that the young man didn't get a square deal, kept their eyes on him, and after he had been wearing the jeans of a mechanic in the shops of the New York Central railroad for some time, and had proved that he was there for business and not fun, they concluded that he had in him the stuff of which men are made and he was invited to sit at the council board of some of the kings of finance.

He recommended himself, and never yet has he failed to make good his recommendation. The president of one of the great corporations of which he is a director thus spoke of him the other day:

"Cornelius Vanderbilt is, in most ways, the best director we have. When he came among us he said nothing and kept his ears open. Every now and then he would come around and ask questions, not of a general, but of a special character. He always wanted to know about some particular end of the business.

"He went about the gathering of his knowledge as carefully and thoroughly as if he were a conscientious salaried employee. He mastered one detail after another, until to-day I believe he knows as much about the business as I do.

"I am a director in one or two other corporations of whose boards he is a member, and I found that he was doing the same thing there. I don't believe there's a man in New York, young or old, who knows as much about all the corporations with which he is connected as Cornelius Vanderbilt.

"His is in no sense a brilliant mind. He is not as brilliant, for instance, as his brother-in-law, Harry Whitney, who is one of the most brilliant young fellows I ever knew; but young Vanderbilt has the get there requisites.

"He is as stubborn as ever his father was, and once he takes hold of a proposition he'll never let up until he knows all about it. This characteristic and his great conscientiousness make him a mighty good man in any board of directors."

Young Vanderbilt was graduated from Yale with the class of '95. He stood somewhat above the middle of his class, was a member of the Psi Upsilon fraternity and the Scroll and Key senior society. He was one of the quiet, retiring men of the class and did not particularly distinguish himself in anything.

In his junior year his classmates insisted that he take a place on the junior promenade committee. He said he didn't want the job, but that didn't matter. His fellows saw that he got it and he served.

To some of his friends the young man seemed to keep out of things for fear that his name or his father's wealth might bring honors to him which, had he been Smith or Brown, he wouldn't get at all. He wanted to win college distinction on his merits.

He did this in his senior year. Although a student in the academic, or classical, course, he took, in his last year, a special course in mechanical engineering at the Sheffield Scientific School. There he was in his element and he handled tools and machinery in a way that astonished his instructors.

That he might carry on his work to the best possible advantage he fitted up a machine shop of his own and worked in it about all his spare time. Yet so quietly was this done that hardly ten men in his class knew anything about it.

In the year following his graduation young Vanderbilt was so much in the company of Miss Grace Wilson, the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. T. Wilson, that the social gossips said that the announcement of their engagement would be but a matter of a short time. The dames of rumor were still speculating as to when the engagement would be announced when fashionable society was jolted with the statement that young Vanderbilt's father and mother were irreconcilably opposed to any such marriage.

Society wondreed why, and is still wondering, for that matter. To be sure, the young woman was somewhat older than the young man, but that seemed to be no good reason for so bitter an opposition to the match. She was then, and still is, one of the most beautiful women in New York. She has golden brown hair, large dark eyes and an exquisite figure.

Her family, a Southern one, is as good as any in the land. One sister married Sir Michael Henry Herbert, the late British Ambassador to the United States, and another married the late Ogden Goelet. Her elder brother married a daughter of Mrs. Astor, and the younger married into the exclusive Mason family of Boston.

Furthermore, she had a brilliant mind, was highly accomplished and her father was wealthy. What was the matter? To what did young Vanderbilt's parents object? To this day only a very few have learned the real cause of the opposition.

One day father and son had a very plain talk. Both became angry.

When it was over the son knew that he was to be as nearly disinherited as could well be arranged, and the father knew that he had a son whose will was as strong as his own and who was going to marry the girl he loved.

Then followed the incident which has never been before set down in type and shows something of the stuff of which this young man is made.

The Wilson residence is a dozen blocks down Fifth avenue from the great Vanderbilt mansion at the northwest corner of Fifty-seventh street. Young Vanderbilt went straight from the interview with his father to the Wilson house and asked to see Richard T. Wilson. To the old gentleman, without waste of words, he said:

"Mr. Wilson, I have received your permission to marry your daughter. When you gave it to me I had expectations of a considerable fortune.

"My father has just informed me that if I marry Grace he will practically disinherit me. That, of course, does not in any way change my intentions, but I want you to know just how things stand, so that if you object to a poor son-in-law you may make those objections known."

The white haired, white bearded banker has always been greatly devoted to his children, their wishes, as a rule, being his laws. The manliness of the young fellow sitting across the drawing room appealed strongly to him and he replied:

"My boy, I am glad you've come to me with this story. If the change in your prospects doesn't matter to you, I guess it won't matter to Gracie, and I am sure it won't make the slightest difference to me. If you can't earn enough for two, I guess I've got enough for you both. Now don't let this bother you too much, and you'd better go tell Grace all about it."

Young Vanderbilt took his future father-in-law's suggestion and was quite as outspoken with his betrothed as he had been with her father. The disinheriting story didn't bother Miss Wilson any, and they were married in the summer of 1896.

His grandfather, whose name he bears, had gone to Saratoga on his honeymoon, and young Vanderbilt took his bride to the same place. After a summer spent at Newport and elsewhere young Vanderbilt told his wife that he'd have to go to work, and he got a job in the operating department of the New York Central Railroad.

He worked in the shops for a considerable time, became acquainted with the practical working of every part of a locomotive, and qualified as a locomotive engineer. Then he went into the office of the chief engineer and did draughting for a while.

His particular bent was to reduce the cost and weight of a locomotive, and he gave his entire attention, finally, to that subject. In order that he might better prosecute his work, he left the employ of the road, and took an office of his own at 100 Broadway.

There he set up drawing tables and worked by himself for a considerable time. When his friends asked him what he was doing, he laughingly said he was trying to find out how much he didn't know.

One day, however, everybody knew what he had been doing, for it was announced from Washington that a patent had been granted to him on a locomotive firebox, which could be removed so much more easily than the old firebox that it was practically a portable concern. It was tried on several of the New York Central locomotives, and found to work with great success. It is now in use on most of the freight engines owned by that road.

That was the first production of the young inventor. Not long afterward he got another patent on a cylindrical tender, which was regarded as so great an improvement over the old oblong affair that after it had been thoroughly tested by the engineers of the Harriman system of railroads, it was adopted for use on all the heavy engines of the Harriman lines.

His latest invention, for which a patent has been applied for, is a tender built in the form of an ellipse instead of a cylinder. The advantage of this form of tender over the cylindrical form is that it is low enough to receive water from the intakes along the line of any railroad. It weighs less and therefore costs less to build than any other tender known.

In eight years Mr. Vanderbilt has demonstrated that he can earn a very comfortable living by his own endeavors. From the three inventions named and from two or three improvements on the inventions of others, all having to do with locomotives, he gets a large income. He has moved his office and draughting room from 100 Broadway to the top floor of 30 Pine street, and he attends to his work as closely as any man in New York.

When it was announced that he was to be appointed First Secretary of the United States Embassy at Berlin many persons were surprised that the life of a diplomatist should appeal to a machinist and inventor. The fact is, however, that Mr. Vanderbilt has long had something of a desire to enter the diplomatic service, and his wife has encouraged him in this desire.

And here it may be stated that Mrs. Vanderbilt has given the greatest sympathy and heartiest encouragement to all her husband's undertakings. It is almost literally true that they have worked together on whatever he has undertaken.

Practically all the married life of Mrs. Vanderbilt's elder sister, Lady Herbert, was spent with her husband in the diplomatic service of England, and what Mrs. Vanderbilt saw of the life rather appealed to her. It was known as far back as 1900, when Mr. Vanderbilt made his entrance into politics as a delegate to the Republican State convention at Saratoga, that he would not be averse to a diplomatic billet.

Ever since his majority he has had a serious notion—he is a serious minded young man—that all young Americans ought to take a proper and healthy interest in politics. The Republican organization of New York county has been quite ready to give him a Congressional nomination several times, but he has always declined, very positively in the last campaign, saying that he felt that he was rather too young and too inexperienced to make the kind of Representative in Congress he thought all Representatives ought to be.

He has held but one public office, that of Civil Service Commissioner, by appointment of Mayor Low. He resigned the office near the end of Mayor Low's term.

As Mr. Vanderbilt had an early notion that young Americans ought to take an interest in politics, so he had the notion that young men, particularly wealthy young men, ought to give some service to the National Guard, the nation's great reserve force in time of war.

He looked over the New York regiments and finally decided to enlist in the Twelfth. When he made known his desire to join that regiment a commission as Second Lieutenant was offered to him, and he accepted it after a season of careful study of tactics and the passing of the necessary examination.

Not long ago the First Lieutenancy in his company was made vacant, and he was promoted. In his examination he received the highest possible rating. At the army manœuvres last fall at Manassas Mr. Vanderbilt served with his regiment and took all the hard knocks that came his way, and they were not a few.

Every member of the Vanderbilt family, except the second and the third Cornelius, has been interested in and owned fast horses. The old Commodore loved a trotting horse better than almost anything he knew. The same was true of his son William H.

William K. Vanderbilt owns a stable of running horses which he is racing in France, and Frederick W. and George Vanderbilt are also somewhat interested in horses. The second Cornelius Vanderbilt and his eldest son did not seem to inherit this great love for the horse.

Instead, young Cornelius finds his sport in yachting. He has been rear commodore of the New York Yacht Club for several years, and he owns the fine steam yacht North Star, named, after the boat owned by old Commodore Vanderbilt, as well as the seventy-foot sloop Rainbow and the steam ferryboat Mirage.

The North Star is one of the finest steam yachts owned by an American. She was built at Barrow, England, in 1893, for the late William Clark, the thread manufacturer. She was formerly called the Sybarite. She is 233 feet long, 29 feet beam, and has a gross tonnage of 818. She was designed by W. C. Story and is fitted with triple expansion engines. Early in the fall she was laid up for the winter at Gourock, near Glasgow.

Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt have lived mostly in leased town houses, but last month Mr. Vanderbilt bought the O. H. P. Belmont house at 677 Fifth avenue, between Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth street, adjoining the house of former Vice-President Morton. The reported price was $450,000, and there the Vanderbilts will make their permanent city home.

It is a four story brownstone structure, with a frontage of fifty feet, and is right in what has been called the Vanderbilt section of the avenue. William K. Vanderbilt's house is at the northwest corner of Fifth avenue and Fifty-second street; William K. Vanderbilt, Jr's., at the next door north, while the so called twin Vanderbilt houses, those occupied by William Douglas Sloane, whose wife is young Cornelius Vanderbilt's aunt, and that of George W. Vanderbilt, occupy the next block south to the one on which William K. Vanderbilt's house is.

Although Cornelius Vanderbilt and his father were never reconciled, it was pleasing news to all their friends when the announcement came over the ocean from London last June that the young man and his wife had become reconciled to his mother. Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Sr., was staying at Claridge's, with her younger daughter, Gladys. Young Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt came over from Paris and put up at the same hotel. The older and the younger matron met one morning in a corridor of the hotel, and the elder stopped, looked at her daughter-in-law smilingly for a moment, and then the two women embraced.

The Duchess of Roxburghe, young Mrs. Vanderbilt's niece, Princess Hatzfeldt, who was the adopted daughter of the late Collis P. Huntington, and other American women, saw the episode, and they lost no time in spreading the tidings. The older and younger Mrs. Vanderbilt were seen much together after that, and no one who knows them doubts now that the old wound has been healed and each has concluded to forget an unpleasant past.

It was said at the time that Cornelius Vanderbilt's two children, Cornelius, Jr., born on April 30, 1898, and Grace, born Sept. 25, 1899, had not a little to do with bringing about the reconciliation. They are particularly attractive children, and the dowager Mrs. Vanderbilt has not hesitated to show her great fondness for them. It was through them, it was said, that the mother and son, for the last five years, got most of their news of each other.

The German Emperor, to whose court it is supposed Mr. Vanderbilt is soon to be accredited, has shown every possible evidence of favor to both the young man and his wife on the occasion of their recent visits to Germany. He has dined aboard their yacht and they have been his guests on shore. When Prince Henry of Prussia was here, a few years ago, a luncheon given by young Mrs. Vanderbilt was the only private function he attended.

It must be said, however, that both young Mr. Vanderbilt and his wife shine by rather a reflected glory. The German Emperor was a very warm friend of the late Ogden Goelet and his wife, who is Mrs. Vanderbilt's sister; and it was through Mrs. Goelet that Mrs. Vanderbilt met the Emperor.

The luncheon given to Prince Henry by Mrs. Vanderbilt was really for Mrs. Goelet, because she was at the time in mourning for her husband. No one doubts, however, that Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt, for themselves, will be very markedly *persona grata* at the German court.

MME. JUMEL'S ROMANCE IN WHICH WASHINGTON FIGURED

PROVIDENCE, R. I., Nov. 26.—Senator Thomas F. Grady's assertion at the hearing in New York on Nov. 19 before Park Commissioner Pallas relative to custody of the Jumel Mansion, to the effect that among the Colonial Dames were descendants of George Washington, would not have excited the surprise in this city it did in New York, nor would the Senator have here been driven to hedge by intimating that he meant descendants of the Washington family, for one of the most cherished traditions of Providence is that the blood of George Washington flows in the veins of Providence people.

Less than twenty years have passed since the man who claimed and was generally believed to be the son of George Washington died, leaving two children. In the city's record of deaths, while the rule is to give the parentage in each case, the space following the death record of George Washington Bowen, Feb. 6, 1885, is left vacant.

The man who compiled the records entertained no more doubt than does any other well-informed citizen of Providence that George Washington Bowen was what he pretended to be, the illegitimate son of Mme. Jumel. His paternity is held to be equally settled beyond question, and that grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Washington still reside in this city is likewise considered certain.

Chauncey Shaffer, in arguing before the United States Supreme Court a case involving the ownership of the Jumel estate, described the history of Mme. Jumel as "romantic, strange, eventful, and in many respects ahead of the most exciting novel. Her rise in life, her progress through life, reminds one more of the elevation of a prisoner to the chair of state under an Eastern despotism than anything in the natural growth of our republican country.

"She was born and raised under most unfavorable circumstances, and it is a miracle of miracles that she ever became such a remarkable woman as she did, for early in life she was wrecked; but she was one of the few wrecked ones who have not floated down the stream and become loathsome weeds to rot on the strand."

Mme. Jumel's remarkable career began in the workhouse in this city. Her parentage was at first unknown. Later she was said to be the daughter of a sailor named Bowen and a widow passing under the name of Phebe Kelly, whose history is found in the Providence town records.

Phebe Kelly came here from Taunton, Mass., in 1769. In 1772 the Town Council razed an old building which had been the rendezvous of blacks and whites of the lowest order, and Phebe Bowen was brought before the Council, an experience she underwent thirteen years later, when in 1785 she was taken from a disorderly house and imprisoned.

Her two children, Polly and Betsy, aged respectively 12 and 10 years, were sent to the workhouse at this time. Betsy became Mme. Jumel.

The next known of Betsy Bowen is when she became a member of the household of Freelove Ballou, on Charles street. Mrs. Ballou was a woman of unsavory reputation and pretended to be a doctor and midwife and was probably a procuress. Then Betsy was lost to public view for a few years, to turn up in New York city as the dazzling Mrs. Jumel.

George Washington visited Providence three times, the first time in his journey from New England after the evacuation of Boston in 1775; the second time in 1781, when he went to Newport to confer with Gen. Rochambeau, in charge of the French troops encamped there; on his return he spent two nights in the house of the Hon. Jabez Bowen here.

The third and most memorable visit was in August, 1790. Gen. Washington had visited New England after the peace treaty, but had avoided Rhode Island because of its failure to ratify the Constitution. On May 29, 1791, this State fell into line, and immediately upon adjournment of Congress in August President Washington made preparations for a journey hither.

He left New York in a packet Newport bound on Sunday, Aug. 15, reaching Newport Aug. 17, and on the following day had a seven hours sail up Narragansett Bay to this city.

He received all the honors due his eminence, ate a family dinner at the Daggett House, later known as the Golden Ball Tavern, and after tea as he was taking leave of his hosts for the night he was asked to visit Rhode Island College, now Brown University, and witness the illumination the students had prepared in his honor.

According to the diary of William Smith, a member of Congress from South Carolina, who was one of the President's party, a "nocturnal procession" to the college was made. On the following afternoon the distinguished visitor left Providence by water for New York.

George Washington Bowen bore so striking a resemblance to the Father of His Country that people who passed him on the street and knew nothing of the strange story of his life turned around to follow him with their eyes. He told his story in court in 1872 in the course of a hearing in a case in which he was plaintiff and Nelson Chase was defendant, brought with the hope of establishing his heirship to the Jumel estate.

At the time of the trial he was 78, having been born in 1794. He had resided in Providence since his birth, with the exception of very short periods during boyhood.

His earliest recollection was of living in the house of Major Reuben Ballou and his wife, Freelove Ballou, on Charles street; he was at that time six or eight years old. Being without natural guardians, his boyhood was one of hardship. He learned the baker's trade, later he was employed as a clerk and at weaving, and in 1815, when he attained his majority, he worked as clerk in a store, finally buying the grocery store of Major Thayer.

He embarked in the India rubber business, then in that of promoting lotteries until this form of industry was forbidden by law. Returning to the grocery business, he continued it for several years, finally turning it over to his son.

He first heard that Mme. Jumel was his mother when he was 38. He frequently visited Saratoga and saw Mme. Jumel there, but never spoke to her. It was his custom to spend his summers at the fashionable spa.

The litigation over the Jumel estate was long and tedious. The defendant, Nelson Chase, claimed to inherit through a niece of Mme. Jumel, whom she had adopted, the illegitimate child of Polly Bowen, to whom was given the name of Mary Barnes until her adoption by Mme. Jumel, when her name was changed to Jumel. This girl married Nelson Chase, who at the death of Mme. Jumel took possession of the estate. As regards Mrs. Chase's kinship to Mme. Jumel, it is fair to say that it was questioned, a rumor circulating that Mrs. Chase was in reality a waif, Mary Wiggin, picked up and adopted by Mme. Jumel to further her own ends.

Mr. Bowen lost his suit, both in the District Court for the Southern District of New York and the Supreme Court. He passed the remainder of his life in his native city. Although he spent a large amount of money in litigation, he was reputed to have enjoyed a competence up to his death from pneumonia, on Feb. 6, 1885.

He was twice married and left two children. Aside from his connection with the Jumel lawsuit and the story of his parentage he was a man who attracted notice because of his likeness, especially between the sixth and eighth decades of his life, to the most familiar pictures of George Washington.

He was tall and rather slender, and always bore himself erectly and proudly, affecting, some thought, the mannerisms of Washington's carriage, and had the aquiline nose and general facial characteristics of his reputed father. For many years before his death he was one of the best known figures on Providence streets.

The manner in which Mme. Jumel made her way in the world is well known. Her alliance with M. Jumel occurred soon after he had arrived in New York from Santo Domingo, whence he was driven by the uprising in which Toussaint L'Overture distinguished himself. After he had left New York for France to prosecute claims for the spoliation of his Santo Domingo property, he gave Mme. Jumel power of attorney to realize on his property in America, with the understanding that she should return it to him.

Instead of carrying out the plan, she possessed herself of his estate. It is believed that M. Jumel, who later joined his wife in New York, never knew that he was not the owner of the property, which they continued to hold in common.

Soon after the death of her husband, Mme. Jumel married Aaron Burr, who had been her counsel, but ere the honeymoon was ended a violent quarrel separated the pair and Mme. Jumel thrust the bridegroom out of doors. To prevent any possibility of a reconciliation she engaged as her lawyer Alexander Hamilton, son and namesake of the man Burr had killed in a duel. Mme. Jumel managed her property independently until her death in 1867.